

The Capital at War

SUMMARY

The Civil War changed the capital as no event had done since the government had moved to Washington in 1800. Immediately following the election of Abraham Lincoln as president in 1860, southern states began to secede from the Union. When President Lincoln moved to aid federal troops at Fort Sumter in the spring of 1861, fighting began. When Virginia left the Union to join the new southern Confederacy, Washington was dangerously exposed to attack. The capital itself was sharply divided between residents who sympathized with southern “rebels” and those who remained loyal to the United States. Many southern sympathizers moved their families out of the city, while some southerners stayed and served as spies for the Confederates. In the Civil War’s first battle at Bull Run, about 30 miles west of Washington, the overconfident federal forces suffered a major defeat.

Following Bull Run, the capital settled down for a long, tough contest of arms. Washington became the center of a national war effort. The most obvious change was that the streets were filled with troops. Thousands of unseasoned soldiers camped at sites scattered around the city’s outskirts. Support facilities of all kinds, including hospitals, armories, quartermaster and transportation depots, and other installations, appeared in many parts of Washington. Because of the capital’s dangerous location, an elaborate ring of forts had to be constructed around it. Thousands of men toiled for many months, hacking out a network of trenches, earthworks, and artillery placements around the city. The hectic pace of wartime activity was unfamiliar to Washington. People worked hard and took their recreation with gusto. Saloons, gambling parlors, and sporting houses flourished.

The war brought dramatic changes in the city’s population. Thousands of northerners swept into Washington to work in government offices, relief agencies, and temporary industrial sites. From the other direction—the south—came thousands of black people, refugees from the war, who had left the plantations. At the war’s height, the population in Washington was probably 140,000,

Main Ideas in This Chapter

1. The Civil War changed the capital as no event had done since the government had moved there in 1800.
2. Washington was dangerously exposed to attack from the new southern Confederacy.
3. The capital was sharply divided between residents who sympathized with southern “rebels” and those who remained loyal to the United States.
4. As the center of a national war effort, Washington was filled with soldiers and war related activities.
5. The war brought dramatic changes in the city’s population, causing a strain on public services.

- How was the city of Washington affected by the threat of a civil war?

or more than double the figures of 1860. Overcrowding was unbelievable, straining all public services to the breaking point. The government's new aqueduct and water-supply system were put to good use, but sanitation was totally inadequate. Other services and physical resources of the city could not meet the demands made on them. Straining to meet both military and civilian needs, the government staggered into the war's last year.

1. The Coming of the War

Abraham Lincoln and Secession

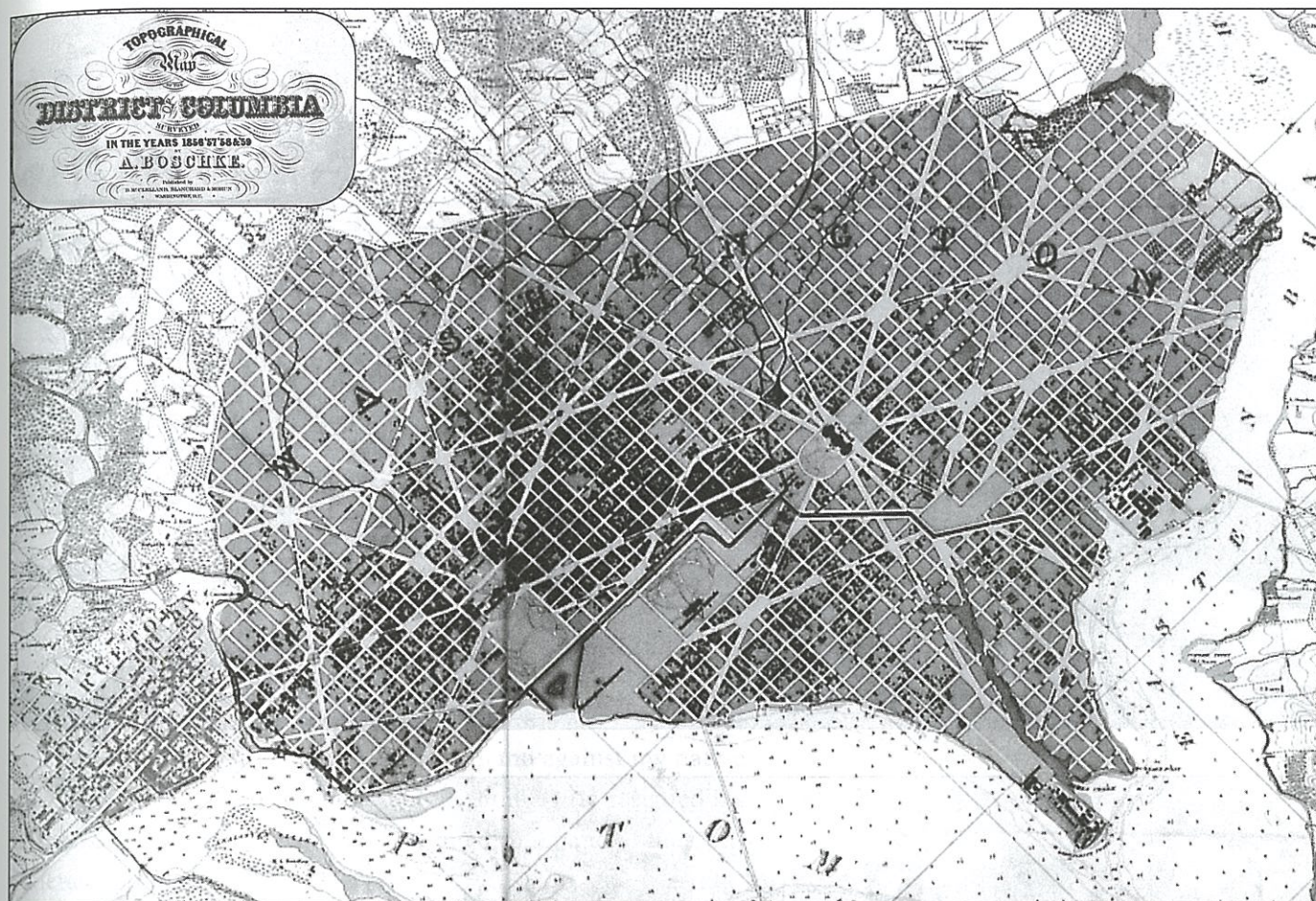
Washington has always been two cities—the federal city and the local city where residents live, work, and play. Before 1860, the federal government played an important role in Washington but did not ordinarily take an active role in local affairs. The Civil War changed all that. From the time of Abraham Lincoln's inauguration in 1861 until after his assassination in 1865, the functions of the nation's capital outweighed local concerns.

The war had been brewing for years. What set off the crisis was Lincoln's election as president after a hotly contested campaign. Some southern states **seceded** from the Union even before Lincoln arrived in Washington for his inauguration.

In February 1861 a peace conference met at the Willard Hotel near the White House. From 21 states came 132 delegates to discuss and preserve the fragile Union. But it was too late.

While Washington awaited Lincoln's arrival, there were rumors of plots to kidnap the president-elect or prevent his inauguration. Local militia companies organized and drilled, but it was uncertain which of these citizen-volunteers could be trusted to defend the new president and the government. Several companies of regular army men were ordered to Washington for the city's protection. Federal troops soon filled the few spaces available to them in the city. New barracks and stables were thrown up to house them on Capitol Hill and near the War Department off 17th Street.

Meanwhile, as these new arrivals galloped their horses up and down Pennsylvania Avenue, some residents made hasty preparations to leave the city. Many southern congressmen, government workers, and members of wealthy families closed their houses, loaded their belongings on wagons, and set out for the steamboats that would take them down the Potomac River. Among the most prominent people who went south were a former mayor of Washington



Detail of a map by A. Boschke of the District of Columbia, 1856–1859

ington, Walter Lenox, who joined the Confederacy as a civilian employee, and a physician, Dr. Cornelius Boyle, who headed the National Volunteers, an organization of wealthy Democratic property owners. A rich Washington banker, W. W. Corcoran, left the country and lived in London until the end of the Civil War.

Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated as president on March 4, 1861, without trouble, but threats and rumors continued. The new Confederate government in the South was preparing for war and had enlisted many high-ranking army and navy officers of the Union in the southern cause. Citizens of the District of Columbia were sworn into jobs of protecting the approaches to Washington. Each night these men guarded the federal buildings, the Navy Yard, and the bridges over the Potomac River and Rock Creek.

After the Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter in the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina, President Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers. Virginia quickly joined the Confederacy, and by May 8 the capital of the rebel government was located in

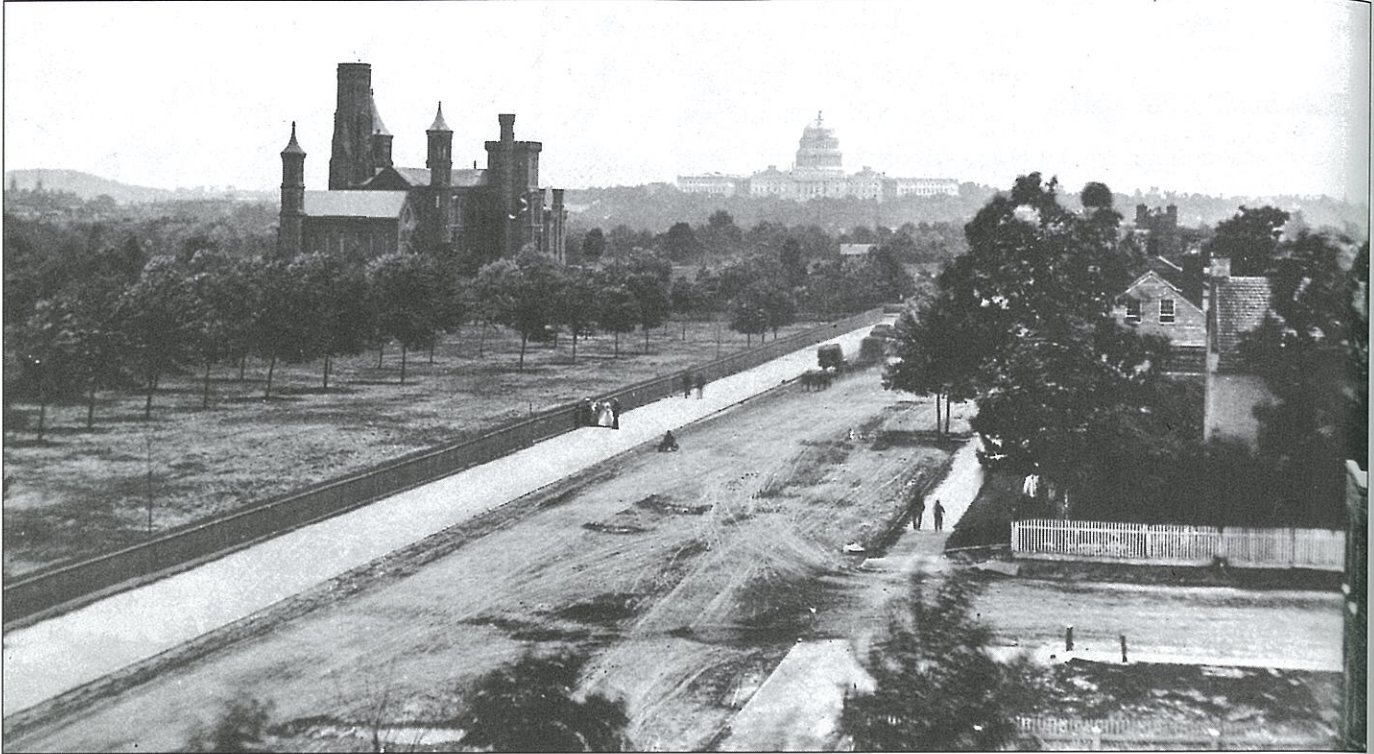
• *Locate the boundaries of Washington City. The darkened areas show the extent of settlement. The patterned areas outside the city represent forests.*

• *Was all of the city populated?*

• *Where did most of the people live?*

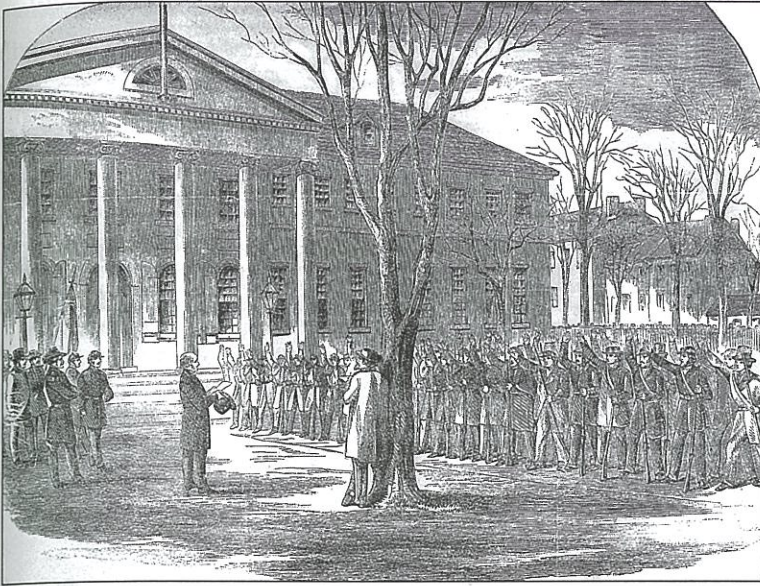
• *What brought people to those areas?*

• *What was the rest of the District of Columbia like?*



Independence Avenue and 12th Street, NW, in 1863 (top) and Maine Avenue in 1865 (bottom)

• Describe the impression you get of Civil War Washington from these two pictures of the city.



In April 1861, one month after Abraham Lincoln was sworn in to serve as president, the first District of Columbia volunteers were sworn in to serve the city.

Richmond. Now the enemy was just across the Potomac River. Lincoln urged Colonel Robert E. Lee to take command of the Union armies. Although opposed to secession, Lee wrote: "I have been unable to make up my mind to raise my hand against my native state, my relatives, my children and my home." He resigned his commission in the U.S. Army and assumed command of the Confederate forces.

After Virginia withdrew from the Union in April 1861, people wondered whether Maryland would follow. Maryland's secession would have isolated the capital and put it in a hopeless position. Fortunately, Maryland's governor refused to call a special session of the state legislature for fear it would pass a secession law.

A Divided City

One of the most disturbing and potentially dangerous problems facing Washington was the question of its citizens' loyalty should war come. Many prominent families had southern roots and were openly sympathetic to the seceding states. Gentlemen expressed their sentiments by "showing their colors"—wearing knots of colored ribbon called cockades indicating federal or Confederate sympathy. People favoring the South became known scornfully as "secesh." Some leading Washingtonians predicted that a majority of the city's people would side with the seceding states.

The loyalty issue affected two elements of the community in particular: the militia and people employed by the federal govern-

- *Why were some people asked to take a loyalty oath?*

The Chain Bridge, over the Potomac, connected Washington and Northern Virginia. Washingtonians feared that Confederate troops would cross the bridge and invade the city.



ment. When it appeared that Washington's militia might defend the city, a northern man, Charles Stone, was appointed colonel of the six militia companies. Early in 1861 Colonel Stone discovered that many militia officers and men would not take an oath of allegiance to the Union. Some officers and men resigned when asked to take the oath. To fill the militia's depleting ranks, Colonel Stone recruited vigorously until he had some 2,000 men under his command.

Roughly 400 to 600 men from the District of Columbia served with the Confederate armed services. Many of these quickly became officers and administrators of the enemy forces. Some Washington families were divided in their loyalties. Several prominent federal employees had sons serving with the Confederacy, and in a few District families, sons fought on *both* sides. For many unhappy people, the war was indeed a case of brother against brother.

Because of its divided loyalties, Washington gained a reputation as being a southern outpost. Congress instituted strict loyalty tests for all federal and local government employees in 1861. A Washington official, Mayor James Berret, was imprisoned and removed from office for refusing to swear allegiance to the Union. Several hundred federal workers were dismissed from their positions for the same reasons. In 1862 Congress required Washington voters to take loyalty oaths if challenged at the polls or lose the right to vote.

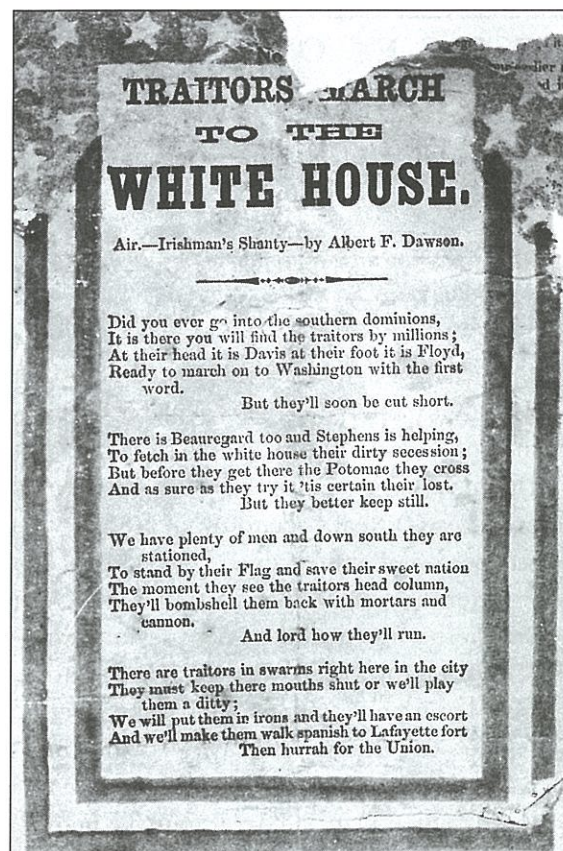
Washingtonians working as Confederate spies were active in the divided city. Throughout the war they passed secrets about federal battle plans to the nearby Confederates through networks of informers. By far the most effective of these spies was Rose Greenhow, a distinguished and popular widow who lived near the White House. As an intimate friend of several leading senators and other high officials, and as a lady of great charm, Rose Greenhow could easily secure information of a most sensitive nature about Union troop movements. By sending details about the federal plans to attack the Confederates in Fairfax County in 1861, she helped bring about the Union's first military defeat. With Mrs. Greenhow and other spies in action, few war secrets were safe from enemy knowledge.

The Capital in Danger

Several weeks of calm followed Lincoln's inauguration; then came Fort Sumter's bombardment and surrender. Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 militia from the states. Generous responses came from 16 northern states, but the border states coldly refused to supply troops. Washingtonians wondered whether, if attacked, their city could be defended. The capital's only protection was Old Fort Washington, 12 miles below the city on the Potomac River. At Baltimore, mobs supporting the Confederacy threw stones and shot at troops sent by train from Massachusetts to reinforce the capital. Four soldiers died and thirty-one were wounded in the incident, and several civilians were killed. Once the exhausted Massachusetts regiment arrived to welcomes from cheering onlookers, they moved immediately to the U.S. Capitol, where they camped in the Senate chamber.

Refugees poured out of Washington, some going north and some going south. The city took on the appearance of a place under siege. Shops were closed; houses, boarded up. The big hotels were deserted as the city waited for news and troops from the north. The main force for the capital's defense consisted of companies of governments clerks, companies of aged veterans of earlier wars, and companies of Irish and German laborers. Plans were made to house the president and his cabinet in the Treasury building at 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. The building's entrances were barricaded, sandbags were piled around it, and water and flour were stored in the basement.

In Baltimore a mob seized the telegraph office, cutting off Wash-



Almost every war has produced patriotic songs.

• What did the writer of this song think about traitors to the Union?

• What other Civil War songs do you know?

• Why did Washingtonians wonder if the city could be defended?

• Where did troops come from?

ROSE O'NEAL GREENHOW

This excerpt is from the book *Reveille in Washington* by Margaret Leech (New York: Harper Brothers, 1941).

• After reading this description of the activities and arrest of the Southern spy Rose O'Neal Greenhow, write an entry for Mrs. Greenhow's diary.

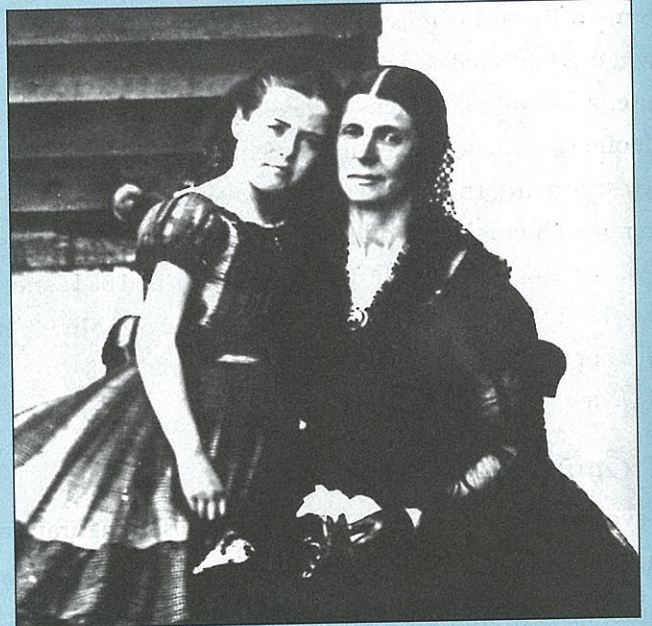
It was not hard to travel between Washington and the enemy lines. There were plenty of people along the Potomac who were glad to serve as . . . ferrymen. The most important of these was the elegant widow, Mrs. Rose O'Neal Greenhow. . . . (She) was regarded as a person of influence. . . .

After the outbreak of hostilities, Mrs. Greenhow's Southern sympathies had not prevented her enjoying the society of Union officers. She was not estranged from her friends among Republican leaders. . . .

Mrs. Greenhow later avowed that her relations with the Republicans had been prompted by a desire to learn their plans, in order to make herself useful to the South. "To this end I employed every capacity with which God had endowed me," she wrote, "and the result was far more successful than my hopes could have flattered me to expect."

Because of the recent death of one of her daughters, Mrs. Greenhow was not going out in society that spring and summer; but she continued, as usual, to receive her good friends. She entertained callow aides and clerks, who blabbed the Government's secrets in her sympathetic ear; and conferred with the Washington secessionists, many of whom, in spite of Republican replacements, still remained in the executive departments. Among the items which Mrs. Greenhow claimed that she forwarded to the Confederates was the map used by the Senate Committee on Military Affairs, with red dotted lines showing the proposed route to Manassas.

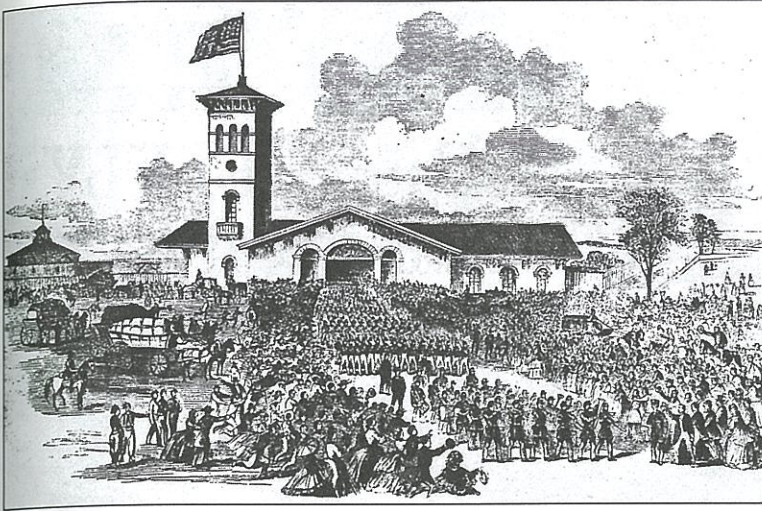
Suspicion fell on Mrs. Greenhow almost at once, and on the sultry morning of August 23—five months before her removal to the Old Capitol—she took her



Rose Greenhow and her daughter. Rose Greenhow was imprisoned in the Old Capitol Prison on Capitol Hill after she was arrested as a Confederate spy.

last promenade in Washington. She had been warned. She knew that she was being watched and followed. On her walk, she was joined by "a distinguished member of the diplomatic corps," and it was not until she reached her door that two men stepped forward, with some mumble of verbal authority, to arrest her. . . .

The house was filled with men. Downstairs, in the parlors divided by a red gauze, Mrs. Greenhow coolly waited while the detectives searched beds, drawers and wardrobes, tumbled out soiled clothes and ransacked the papers in her library. All was quietly done in the hope that, if no alarm were raised, some accomplices might call. But little Rose ran out to climb a tree in the garden and shout to the passers-by, "Mother has been arrested!" Detectives issued from the house, and dragged the eight-year old rebel from the trees, in tears. In spite of her warning, a number of Confederate sympathizers presented themselves, and were promptly taken into custody.



Troops from New York arriving at the Baltimore and Ohio depot. During the Civil War, Washington became an armed camp, and northern soldiers defended the city from invasion by Confederate troops.

ington's communications with the north. Marylanders also prevented rail traffic from operating on the lines north of Baltimore, so that troops could not be transported to defend Washington. Each day people anxiously waited at the railroad depot for reinforcements, and each day they were disappointed. Rumors circulated that an army was gathering in Virginia to invade the city.

For six days the capital waited, isolated. Finally a train jammed with soldiers arrived unannounced. It was the Seventh New York Regiment, which had come by way of Annapolis, repairing a bro-

A letter from a government clerk describing the arrival of the Sixth Massachusetts Regiment:

While I am writing the Sixth Massachusetts regiment is marching by my window in full uniform and fully armed. It is an imposing sight. There are one thousand of them. This is the regiment that had the fight in Baltimore on their way to this place. I forgot to tell you that the U.S. government have taken possession of the rail road between here and Annapolis so that hereafter there will be no difficulty in getting troops from there. They came to that place by water.

Tell father I want him to write me and tell me how he succeeded in getting in the wheat. I fear he has had to work very hard and wish I could have been there to help him. But that could not under the circumstances be and I hope to be able to so arrange it before many years that he will not have to work. I wish I was able to send some money but I am afraid I will not be able to send much of my first month's salary. I have had to get credit for some clothing and different things which will take a good part of it.

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THE FIRE ZOUAVES

The soldiers of one regiment, the Fire Zouaves, were well known for their lack of discipline. Recruited from the volunteer fire companies of New York City, they got their name from their colorful Turkish style uniforms. When they arrived in Washington, the Fire Zouaves were housed in the House chamber of the Capitol building, where representatives normally met. After disrupting the life of the city for a week, the Fire Zouaves had a chance to put their daring to good use.

When the alarm was sounded for a fire in a Pennsylvania Avenue tailor shop, the regiment burst from the Capitol, dashed down the Avenue, broke into the firehouse, and dragged fire hoses across the street. The gathering crowds saw a demonstration of firefighting unlike anything they had seen before. The fire threatened the Willard Hotel, which stood next to the tailor shop. The Fire Zouaves climbed on a burning roof, in and out of windows, and formed human ladders to pass up buckets of water. Even though the tailor shop was destroyed, the Fire Zouaves saved one of Washington's principal hotels and became heroes.

• Write an article for a New York paper using the headline "The Fire Zouaves Do Their City Proud."



ken railroad line to reach Washington. Crowds cheered as the troops marched up Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House to the U.S. Capitol. Soon other northern troops followed, and normal life returned to Washington's homes and businesses. Communication between the capital and the north was restored.

The First Bloodshed

Activity in Washington during the war years followed the fortunes of the Union Army of the Potomac. Sometimes the city was

• How did the Battle of Bull Run affect Washington?



Union troops on their way to Manassas, Virginia, pass the Stone Church at Centreville.

filled with marching troops on their way to the battlefields. At other times, the capital received the military's sick, dead, and wounded.

The first hero to die in combat belonged to the Fire Zouaves of New York, a colorful fighting unit. In May, after Virginia voters ratified the state's secession law, Union military chiefs were determined to take possession of Alexandria. Colonel Elmer Ellsworth, leader of the Fire Zouaves, took his unit into Alexandria under cover of night. As daylight arrived, Ellsworth discovered a Confederate flag flying from the roof of the Marshall House, an inn. Ellsworth quickly climbed up to the building's roof and tore down the flag. As he returned from his mission, he was surprised and shot to death by the innkeeper. His death caused a sensation in Washington. Ellsworth had been greatly loved by his men. Even President Lincoln took a personal interest in this dynamic young leader. His funeral at the White House drew immense crowds of people.

Newspaper stories encouraged northerners to believe there would be a quick Union victory in the war. People were impatient to end the long period of military inactivity and engage the enemy.

• Find Manassas on a map of Virginia. How far is it from Washington?

President Lincoln felt the public pressure and urged his generals forward. In July 1861, the first major battle of the war took place in Manassas, Virginia, only a short distance from Washington. People in Washington were excited to see Union troops march toward Confederate lines in Virginia. Vehicles and horses were pressed into services to take soldiers to the front. Civilians, seeing the city to find carriages and horses that remained, followed the army to see firsthand what promised to be the first great Union victory. Thousands of Washingtonians, armed with picnic lunches, set off for a hill overlooking the battlefield to spend a sociable Sunday.

At first the battle seemed to go well. President Lincoln received telegraph messages that the Union forces were moving ahead. Confederate troops seemed to be in retreat as they fell back from Fairfax to a small stream called Bull Run near Manassas Junction. With 30,000 troops, the Union forces outnumbered the Confederates' 24,000 men. For a time the battle seemed to be at a standstill. General Thomas J. Jackson, a former professor of mathematics at the Virginia Military Institute, inspired the Confederates to stand "a stone wall" until help arrived. This earned him the nickname "Stonewall" Jackson. His effort held back the Union troops until 9,000 more Confederate troops entered the battle and turned the tide.

To everyone's surprise, the Union forces began to retreat. Fictitious messages came to federal officials from the battlefields as Union troops were driven back through Fairfax, many of them running from the enemy, abandoning animals, vehicles, and weapons. Washington's people learned of the defeat from civilian spectators who dashed back to the city with terrible tales of the army's failure. Some of the spectators, including Congressman Alfred E. New York State, were trapped behind Confederate lines and captured. The Union army lost almost 3,000 men at Bull Run, and many wounded men poured into Washington after the battle, where there were not enough hospital beds for them. Citizens awoke Monday morning to find wounded men lying on cots in the streets in front of their homes. The Union loss at Bull Run discouraged hopes for a quick victory in the war.

About a month later the capital learned one of the reasons for the Union tragedy at Bull Run. Authorities arrested a Confederate spy, Mrs. Rose Greenhow, after discovering that she had transmitted details of the federal battle plans to Confederate generals.

2. Washington in Wartime

The City and the Army

After hopes for a short war dissolved, President Lincoln called for 500,000 men to volunteer for three years of service. In the late summer of 1861, some 50,000 of these men were in the Washington area to serve in the Army of the Potomac under the leadership of General George B. McClellan. McClellan, who was aristocratic in bearing, strict, and attentive to detail, became Washington's new hero.

The new recruits had to be housed and fed. They had to be kept supplied and armed, trained and drilled. They had to be kept healthy. For the war's duration, the armed forces had a visible impact on the capital's physical growth.

At first, before barracks were built for them, soldiers were quartered in the U.S. Capitol, the Treasury and Patent Office buildings, the Navy Yard, the city hall, and several private structures. The Capitol grounds served as a popular parade area for troops. By late summer, barracks had been hastily erected outside the city limits in Washington County and across the Potomac at Arlington. Even with most camps in the suburbs, army activities kept the war effort visible in central Washington. On the Mall, the area around the unfinished Washington Monument was transformed into a great cattle yard. Ships landed cattle at the 7th Street wharves; they were driven through the streets to the monument grounds and slaughtered there. Army butchers cut up and dressed the beef for distribution to camps in the suburbs. The odors of thousands of milling cattle combined with those of the slaughterhouse must have given central Washington a pungent aroma.

Also on the Mall were horse stables to serve mounted troops, with nearby sheds for hay and grain. Troops slept and drilled on the Mall, near the messes of officers and men and the bunkhouses for civilian laborers. Not far away, Foggy Bottom was crowded with wagon sheds, corrals for 3,000 horses and mules, and extensive barracks. One military activity on the Mall was especially interesting to Washingtonians: flying army hot-air balloons. Thaddeus Lowe, inventor of a gas generator for filling balloons, had been appointed chief of the army Balloon Corps. On the Mall, his corps experimented with balloons used by the Union to observe the enemy from the air.

The military demand for space seemed unending. Montgomery

• *How would the capital be defended?*

C. Meigs, the builder of the capital's new water-supply system, was quartermaster general of the army and took over the Corcoran Gallery of Art (now the Renwick Gallery) as his headquarters. Nearby he set up the army clothing depot. Across the Anacostia River, where Bolling Air Force Base is today, the cavalry depot shipped more than 20,000 tons of hay and grain each month to the Army of the Potomac. The government built new facilities at the 7th Street wharves to handle greatly increased shipping.

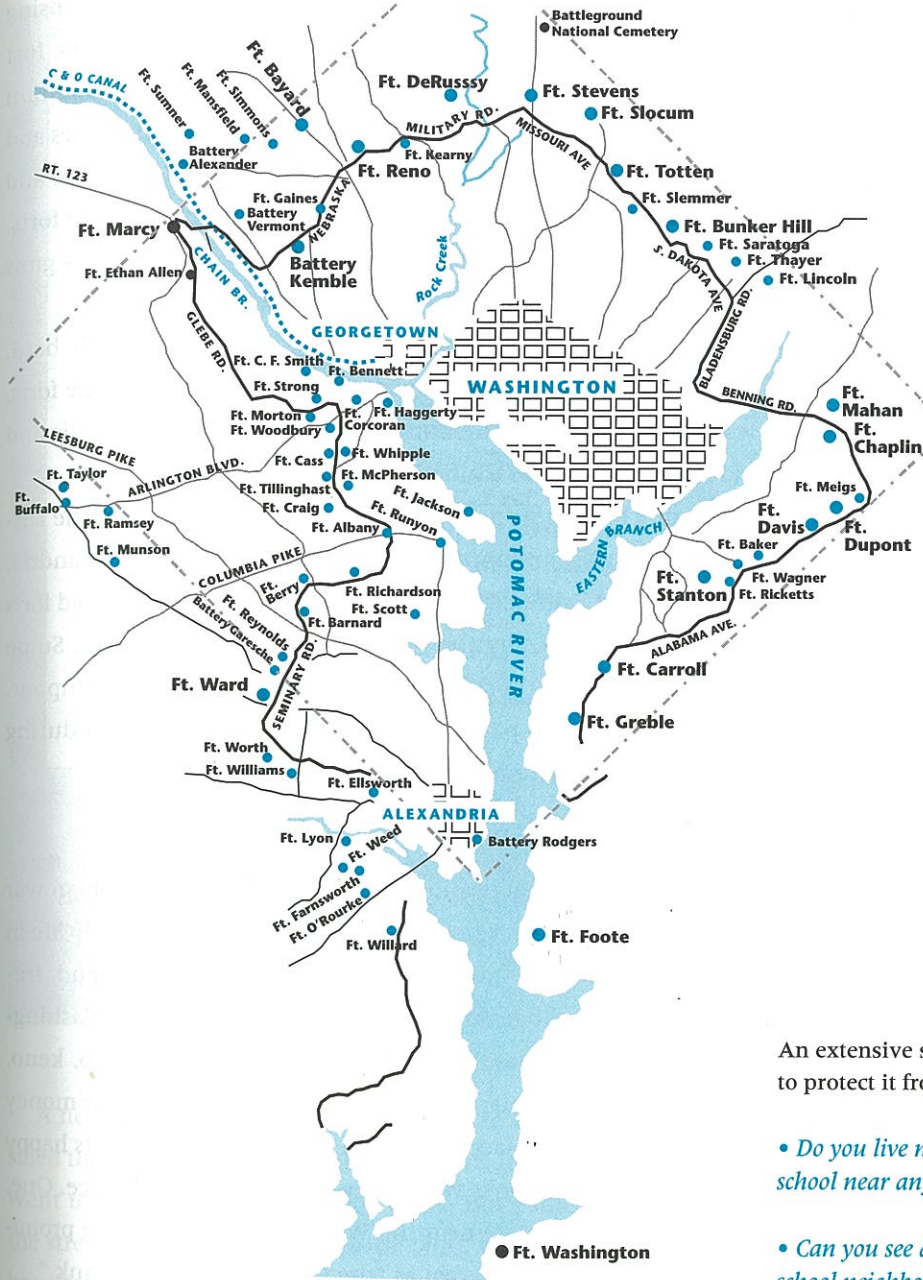
Of all military institutions in wartime Washington, the most conspicuous were hospitals. Mostly these were clusters of white wooden buildings and tents. From time to time, in emergencies, private buildings were converted into wards for the wounded and sick. Union Hospital, formerly the Union Hotel, was one of these; the Georgetown Female Seminary was another. Three churches in Georgetown served as hospitals. More typical of government hospitals was Armory Square Hospital on the Mall. In addition to wards for the sick and wounded, the hospital had a kitchen, a dining hall, a house to receive the dead, a meat and ice house, a small church, and housing for the chaplain and nurses. The flimsy wooden buildings covered several acres below the Capitol.

In addition to the impact of camps, hospitals, and other facilities, the vast military presence in the capital changed the city's atmosphere. Streets were more crowded than ever before and constant activity largely replaced the slow ways of Washington in former times. Louisa May Alcott, the author of *Little Women*, spent some time as a nurse in Washington in 1862. She described the street life:

Long trains of army wagons kept up a perpetual rumble from morning until night. Ambulances rattled to and fro with busy surgeons, nurses taking an airing or convalescents going in parties to be fitted for artificial limbs. Strings of sorry looking horses passed. Often a cart came by carrying several rough coffins and no mourners following; barouches with invalid officers rolled around the corner and carriage loads of pretty children with black coachmen, footmen and maids. . . .

Defending the Capital

From the time of the first war crisis in April 1861, Washingtonians were terrified of one thing above all others: invasion. Their fear influenced decisions about strategy and the use of troops. Whenever the Army of the Potomac began to move against the enemy, a portion of the Union forces remained near the capital to



An extensive system of forts ringed the nation's capital to protect it from invasion by the Confederate forces.

• Do you live near any of these old forts? Do you go to school near any of them?

• Can you see any evidence of the fort in your home or school neighborhood?

defend it. This sometimes interfered with the army's ability to move, but to members of Congress and the cabinet, keeping Washington out of enemy control was the war's primary aim.

One consequence of the need to defend the city was an extensive system of fortifications extending completely around Washington. In August General McClellan ordered construction of 48 forts, gun batteries, and other defense works capable of mounting 300 guns. To supervise construction he assigned Major John G.

Barnard, a career army engineer. Work began immediately, using army recruits and hired laborers as construction gangs. The fort builders simply took over land they wanted, paying no attention to private owners who lost fields, orchards, barns, even houses and churches. The **terrain**, the need for protection of key points, and existing roads leading into the city dictated placement of the forts. In general, the best locations were high points where artillery guns and sharpshooters could look down on any invaders.

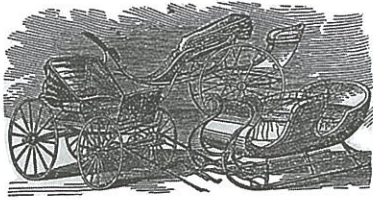
The work, heavy construction done by hand, was brutally hard. In some instances, the crews built military roads between the forts. Besides fortifications, the army stationed guards at all roads and bridges leading into Washington.

The ring of forts stretched through the outer heights of the District of Columbia and into Virginia, with positions in Alexandria, Arlington, and Fairfax. Today there are remnants of many old forts maintained as parks by the National Capital Park System. Some sites are Fort Reno, Fort Stevens, Fort Lincoln, and Fort Dupont. Though these green parks of today looked quite different during the Civil War, they remind us of those anxious years.

Daily Life Under Pressure

The presence of thousands of soldiers and officers, civilian workers, and war contractors added new pressures to daily life in the capital. Many of the newcomers, with money to spend, frequented the city's bars and gambling houses. Wartime Washington had about 100 gambling houses where games of faro, keno, and poker were popular, even though public gambling for money was illegal. The best places had servants who kept the guests happy with free food and drinks while they played games of chance. One located over a drugstore near the Willard Hotel, had such a prominent trade that it was known as "the Congressional faro bank."

Bars were popular meeting places. During the war, despite the army's effort to control drunkenness, many bars opened to provide entertainment for idle troops. There were fashionable saloons such as Tim Sullivan's on Rum Row. Most of the estimated 2,000 bars were hidden away in shanties in such areas as Hell's Bottom. This section, in the area of Q and T Streets between 9th and 10th Streets in the city's Northwest section, was said to be one of the worst in town. Its seedy bars were filled with gamblers and criminals. Many a young soldier on a visit to Hell's Bottom soon found his pay missing.

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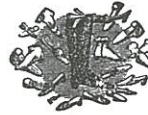
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Cor. of Pennsylvania Avenue and Sixth Street,

WASHINGTON, D. C.

Physicians' prescriptions carefully compounded at all hours, day or night.

A need to relieve the pressures of war and overcrowding intensified the pace of social life. People worked and played, visited, and went to church, as they had for years. Boys sold newspapers on the street corners, shouting out the latest headlines. For shoeshine boys, business was better than ever as muddy soldiers' boots were added to the shoes of their regular customers. People held even more parties and dances and went to the theater. President Lincoln, as the war went on, took increasing pleasure in attending performances at Leonard Grover's (sometimes called the National) Theater or at John Ford's Theater. These playhouses had opened during the war and were popular places where an evening's entertainment could be had for 25 cents.

Private entertainment flourished. The war seemed to encourage lavish, expensive parties held in grand style. The height of Washington's social season had always taken place while Congress

THE MEMOIR OF J. HOLDSWORTH GORDON

J. Holdsworth Gordon was a youngster in Georgetown during the Civil War. His reminiscences give us a clue as to what life was like in Washington at that time. In this passage, he remembers what he did for amusement.

Another of our neighbors was Mr. Edgar Patterson. Mr. Patterson was an old bachelor and a great fisherman. He, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Lowndes, two other of our prominent citizens, owned a boat and would frequently go up the Potomac fishing. Occasionally Mr. Patterson would invite me to go with the party. It was the greatest delight to me. I would "sit as quiet as a mouse" in the bow of the boat while they would let the lines drop into the water. We would row almost to the Chain Bridge, and the favorite place was "The Parlor" as it was called, a sort of place carved out of the banks. The river at that time was well supplied with fish: rock, perch, and particularly immense eels. I remember also that there were many "bald-headed" eagles on the Virginia shores. At times our party would catch a large eel, and I have often watched with the greatest excitement as it would wriggle and twist, tangling the lines terribly—but not always. All the gentlemen of the party were "users of the weed," as tobacco chewers were then designated. As long as the eel

was in the water it would remain straightened out to its full length, and only when hauled out of its native element, would the twisting begin. Knowing this, our wise fisherman would slowly pull the captive to the top of the water, and when the head of the fish appeared at the surface, into his mouth, as swift and straight as an arrow from the bow, would fly a mouthful of tobacco juice. It was wonderful to see how swiftly the eel stopped his contortions and became first limp, and then stiff as though filled with molten lead. After that it was an easy matter to release the hook from its mouth and throw it over board. I have often seen an eagle dip down and seize a floating eel and carry it off to its eyrie in the lofty trees on the hill tops. An eagle now sailing through the air would excite comment; in those days they were very numerous.

We used to have grand times sledding down the hills on Congress Street, now 31st. The young boys and girls would gather in large numbers in the afternoon, when school was over, and slide clear from the top of the hill to Bridge (now "M") Street. There were but few vehicles in those days and the danger was not great. I remember that the Bodisco boys, sons of one of the attachés of the Russian Legation, who lived in Georgetown, had a sled brought from their own country—a long iron affair that sped like the breezes.

• After reading his story, write about your childhood for a historian to read years from now. You might also interview an older relative about what he or she did for amusement.

was in session. Now Congress met continuously and entertainment was year-round. A government official wrote in 1864: "Gayety has become an epidemic in Washington this winter, as gloom was last winter. There is a lull in political discussions; and people are inclined to eat, drink, and be merry." Luxurious dinners at the mansions of wealthy residents included such delicacies as roast Russian duck, fancy pastries, different wines, and champagne. Ladies and gentlemen in formal dress danced to music provided by local orchestras.

In the fall of 1863, fashionable Washingtonians added to their list a new entertainment. On the afternoon when the National

Race-Course opened, near the insane asylum across the Anacostia River, crowds packed the stands. They had come to watch and wager, as three horses competed in harness races for the great prize of \$1,000. After the races, traffic jams of horse-drawn carriages stretched over the Navy Yard bridge and into southeast Washington.

Many people in the capital found momentary relief from worries about the war by going to the circus. One showman, Thaddeus J. Barton, brought his circus from New York to Washington. He received permission from the mayor to erect a building across from the Center Market at 7th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. When P. T. Barnum brought his circus to town, everyone wanted to see the world's smallest performers, the midgets Commodore Nutt and Tom Thumb, who was less than 40 inches tall. Tom Thumb and his tiny wife were received by President Lincoln at the White House.

For working people, the pressures of wartime demanded longer hours and harder labor. Visiting neighbors on Sunday afternoon was a favorite and inexpensive pastime. Daily shopping at Center Market or local grocery stores and markets provided housewives with an opportunity to socialize. Women gathered around the cartmen who peddled produce and fish from horse-drawn wagons. Men had their social centers in saloons and barber shops.

3. War Changes the City

Population Growth and Change

One of the most obvious changes brought by war was the capital's population growth. At the war's height, in 1864, the city population was estimated at 140,000, more than double the people counted in the 1860 census. Some observers judged the maximum wartime population to be substantially higher than even this estimate.

Not only did the population grow, but also it changed in character. Before the war, the capital's people had been principally southern in origin. The war itself drove off several thousand southerners, while it attracted a vigorous new group from the North. These new people included government employees who were needed to fill the many new posts and bureaus created by the war effort. Other northern newcomers were medical personnel—both doctors and nurses—who came on missions of mercy to aid the

RIVERS & DERIOUS'
COMBINATION
CIRCUS!
AND
BEDOUIN ARAB TROUPE
For a SHORT TIME ONLY, on Lot
COR. OF NEW YORK AVENUE AND 6TH STREET.
COMMENCING
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1864
MASTER EDDIE RIVERS!
The Youthful Phenomenon, only 8 years old, in his
WONDERFUL ACTS!
OF FUNCHENELLE AND TIGHT ROPE PERFORMANCES.
THE DELAVANTE BROTHERS!
THE GREATEST GYMNASTS OF THE AGE.
JOHN FOSTER!
THE CELEBRATED AMERICAN JESTER, (first appearance in this city.)
TOGETHER WITH A FULL COMPANY,
EVERY AFTERNOON & EVEN'G
ADMISSION.....FIFTY CENTS
CHILDREN.....TWENTY-FIVE CENTS
Doors open at 2 and 7; performance to commence at 8 and quarter to 8.
D. A. KEYES, AGENT.
H. Falkenhorn & Son's Steam Job Press, 375 and 377 D street.

• How did the population of Washington change as a result of the war?

thousands of sick and wounded who filled the capital's hospitals. Female nurses under the supervision of Miss Dorothea Dix of Massachusetts came to Washington as volunteers. Until this time, women had not been thought suited for the severe conditions of military hospitals. Another group of northerners managed the United States Sanitary Commission in the capital.

Thousands of other northern people came to the capital for more selfish reasons. Some, called "sutlers," set up wagons near the army camps to sell food and other items to the troops. Other entrepreneurs came to obtain government contracts for provisions, clothing, and equipment with which to fight the war. Landing government contracts could mean great profits to suppliers. Staying at local hotels, socializing with congressmen and officials of the administration, war contractors worked hard and spent freely to obtain business.

During the war, the Western Union telegraph office moved into a four-story brick building with a long wooden porch on the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 14th Street. This section of 14th Street became known as "Newspaper Row," with "Rum Row" nearby. One young man who frequented Newspaper Row during this time was Samuel L. Clemens, who wrote stories under the name of Mark Twain.

The majority of northerners attracted to Washington during the war stayed only temporarily. Some stayed on after the war, however, giving the city a more northern, more national character.

A very different group of wartime newcomers consisted of refugees from the southern states. African-Americans escaping from slavery made up the greatest number of these refugees. By the spring of 1863, about 10,000 of these desperately poor former field hands had come to Washington. As the Union army penetrated deeper into Virginia, slaves simply walked away from their owners. In effect, they emancipated themselves. By 1865, as many as 40,000 black people had migrated into the capital, creating a whole new set of problems for Washington's black community and for the city as a whole. They also created a new set of opportunities.

New Services for the People

An unforeseen effect of the Civil War in Washington was the modernization of the city services—police and fire protection.

- *What hardships did Washingtonians suffer because of the war?*



"Newspaper Row," looking up the east side of 14th Street from Pennsylvania Avenue toward F Street, NW. During the war, the nation was hungry for news from the front. More than 25 journalists settled in Washington to gather news of the war and transmit it to their readers back home. By 1865, various news bureaus and correspondents had centered here.

• What building now stands on the southeast corner of 14th and F Streets, NW?

health care, water supply and sanitation, transportation, education, and maintenance of streets and public facilities. Inadequate for an overgrown town of 60,000 people, these services failed completely for more than twice that population during the war. As a wartime necessity, reform of city services began.

To face the threat of crime and disorder, Congress in 1861 created a metropolitan police force under federal control. With authority over the whole District of Columbia, the new force could now number up to 150 patrolmen. In 1862 members of the force were given power to make sanitary inspections. Despite its much greater efficiency, the metropolitan police force could not begin to cope with the disorder in the city. Several thousand soldiers on guard duty were essential to keeping the peace.

Major fires revealed the inadequacy of volunteer fire companies for controlling the menace of conflagration. This recognition led the city council in 1864 to provide for a salaried fire chief and firefighters, with modern equipment purchased by the city.

Events in 1861 illustrated how poorly the capital was equipped with health-care facilities. Shortly after hostilities began, the government took over the Washington Infirmary for a military hospital. Since 1844, this building at Judiciary Square had been the city's

only real hospital. A group of capital physicians then secured help from the Sisters of Mercy, a Catholic order of nuns, who established Providence Hospital. In June 1861, the new hospital opened in a large mansion at 2nd and D Streets, SE, on Capitol Hill. During the war, Providence was the only civilian hospital in the city. For many years it received federal funds to care for needy people and government workers. Besides an ineffective program of smallpox vaccinations, little more was done to fill the capital's public health needs.

One serious problem in the city was solved with completion of the aqueduct and water supply system by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1863. Shortages of labor and materials had delayed construction, but by 1864, 10,000 gallons of fresh Potomac River water were available each day in Washington. Although a great asset to health and fire protection, the new water system did little to help sanitary conditions in the capital. When the war began there were few sewers, and people still threw trash and garbage into the streets, alleys, or vacant lots. The army began hauling away its abundant wastes, including carcasses of dead horses in 1863. During the same year, the first municipal garbage carts were used to collect the accumulated filth in the streets and alleys. Nevertheless, basic sanitation would be impossible until sewers could be laid.

Public transportation made great strides during the war. In 1861 the city's old omnibus lines still ran between Georgetown and Navy Yard and through the business sections. Street railways were thought to be unsuited to the sprawling city. However, a group of Philadelphia speculators used its influence in Congress to charter the Washington and Georgetown Railway in 1862. The horse-drawn line between the Navy Yard and Georgetown opened in October 1862, and the 7th and 14th Street lines were finished a month later. Local investors built the Metropolitan Railroad along F Street in 1864. Another improvement in transportation was completion of a steam railroad across the Long Bridge to Alexandria. Built for the army, this line was the first direct rail connection between Washington and the south.

In 1862, responding to the clear inadequacy of Washington's public schools, Congress passed a law requiring three months of schooling each year for all children between the ages of six



The arch of twin pipes pictured here was completed in 1863 as the Washington Aqueduct. The fresh water it carried played an important role in improving health and fire protection in the overcrowded city.

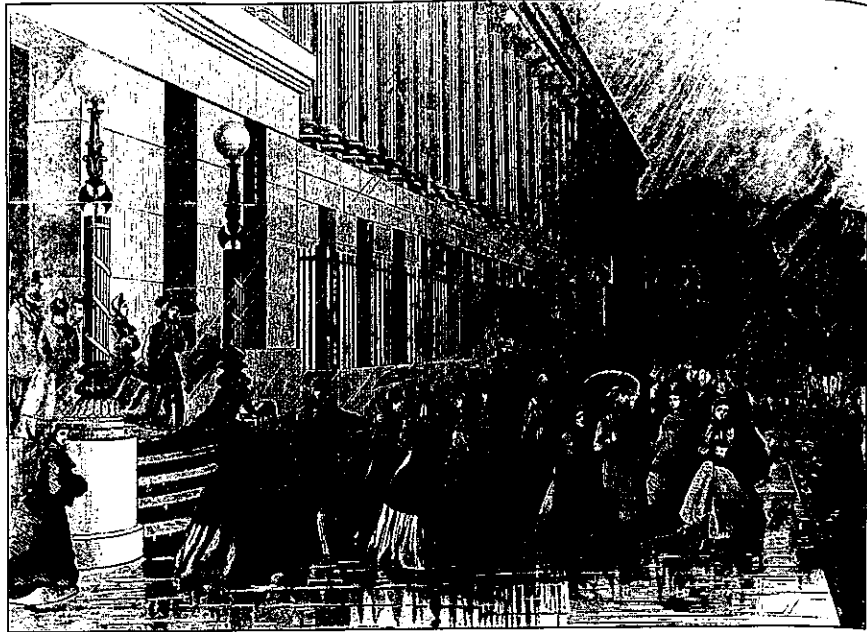
fourteen. The city council raised the school tax and created a building fund. In 1864, monies from this fund were used to build the first large new schoolhouse in the city's history, the Wallach School, on Capitol Hill. Unfortunately, it made only a slight impact on the needs of thousands of children for classroom spaces. It was for white children only.

The problem of maintenance for streets, sidewalks, and public spaces grew during the war years. As usual, the municipal government had totally inadequate funds to grade or pave heavily traveled streets. The multiplied traffic of thousands of horses, heavy vehicles, and marching troops tore the streets into muddy marshes and rutted dustbowls. In 1864 Congress authorized sharing of costs for some street maintenance between federal and city authorities but once again provided no funds for the federal share.

Stress and Strain

The Civil War years produced added stress for the people of Washington. One source of strain was overcrowded housing. Little new building could take place, yet thousands of new residents needed places to live. People doubled up, householders rented rooms, and hotels filled to overflowing. Working people and destitute refugees set up tents, built shanties, or moved into places not meant for habitation.

Along with other wartime hardships, Washington's people suffered the effects of inflation. Between 1860 and 1866, it was esti-



Female clerks coming out of the Treasury Building at 4:00 P.M. on a wet day

mated that prices for eleven necessities increased by an average of 131 percent. Salaries of government clerks, set before the war, remained stationary. One estimate indicated that the average salary of a Treasury clerk, officially \$1,200 per year, actually was only about \$837 after taxes and the reduced value of the dollar. One group of government employees sponsored an effort to commute to work from Baltimore. This group estimated that basic living costs for a family of five in Washington came to \$1,333, compared to \$940 per year in Baltimore. Labor strikes for higher wages occurred at the Treasury, the Government Printing Office, and on the street railway system. Local government employees on fixed salaries, such as teachers and policemen, also suffered greatly from the inflation. Skilled workers in short supply, however, did quite well, with wages as high as \$3.50 per day.

Women took advantage of new opportunities for employment. Because of the labor shortage, women took jobs at the Treasury and the Government Printing Office. At the arsenal and the Navy Yard they made cartridges. Some 600 "Treasury girls" worked chiefly in the currency department at cutting up sheets of paper money. Their pay of \$50 per month was barely enough to live on in the inflated Washington economy. Though they gained new opportunities to work, women did not enjoy salaries equal to the

of men for doing similar jobs. Some women went on strike, unsuccessfully, for higher wages. At the war's end, most female government employees lost their jobs or were replaced by men.

The effects of the Civil War in the capital were many and varied. Some were trivial; some were important but temporary; some were complex. Some changes forecast other changes to come. The growth in the federal work force and expansion of municipal services were evidence of new trends that would affect the capital's future.

FOR REVIEW

1. Identify the following people and relate each of them to Washington, D.C., during the Civil War:

Abraham Lincoln	George B. McClellan
Robert E. Lee	Dorothea Dix
Rose O'Neal Greenhow	Samuel L. Clemens
Elmer Ellsworth	

2. Write one or two sentences explaining how each of these terms relates to Washington, D.C., during the Civil War period:

"secesh"	fortifications
loyalty oath	inflation
Battle of Bull Run	

3. How did Washington change during the Civil War? Write a paragraph answer in which you discuss changes in the size and physical condition of the city, the size and makeup of population, and the various attitudes of the people living in the city.

4. Make a list of problems that developed in the nation's capital as a result of the Civil War.

5. What problems first existed in terms of defending the nation's capital? How were those problems resolved?

BE CREATIVE

Pretend that you are living in Washington during the Civil War; write a letter to a friend in another city describing Washington. Include in your description family life, freedmen, soldiers, defenses, the state of city services, job opportunities, attitudes of Washingtonians toward the war, and available entertainment.

OR

Draw pictures of scenes of Washington during the war. Illustrate such topics as prominent people, soldiers, Civil War forts, life in the war camps, types of entertainment, and changes in the physical condition of the city.

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